

United States Customhouse and
Post Office Building (Old)
17 School Street
Rockland
Knox County
Maine

HABS No. ME-139

HABS
ME
7-ROCLA
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

UNITED STATES CUSTOMHOUSE AND POST OFFICE BUILDING (OLD)

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Location: 17 School Street (on lot bounded by Limerock Street on north, School Street on south, unnamed one-block street on west, and private property on east), Rockland, Knox County, Maine.

Present Owner: United States Government.

Present Occupant: Unoccupied.

Present Use: Vacated on November 19, 1967. Demolished October, 1969.

Statement of Significance: The Rockland Customhouse and Post Office is an excellent example of Government building of the Grant era and is notable for its restrained design and substantial construction.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure is built. Reference is to A History of Public Buildings under the Control of the Treasury Department (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), p. 247.

1873 United States Government purchased site on August 12, 1873 for \$12,000.

1876 A small triangular portion of site was sold for \$525 by United States Government in August, 1876. Ownership of rest of site, bounded on north 182'-9" by Limerock Street, on south 156'-4" by School Street on east 185'-6" by private property, and on west 144' by unnamed one-block street, has remained with United States Government since 1873.

1967 Site offered for sale by General Service Administration of United States Government since November 19, 1967.

2. Date of erection: 1873-1877. Post Office portion was first occupied in 1876. Cost of construction was \$132,828.11.

3. Architect: Alfred Bult Mullett (1834-1890).
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Original plans, elevations, sections, and details by Mullett, and later construction plans for alterations and additions are in offices of Public Buildings Service, General Services Administration, Region 1, United States Post Office and Courthouse Building, Boston, Massachusetts 02109.
5. Alterations and additions: Post Office counter screen was altered in 1895. New plumbing was installed in basement and on first and second floors in 1903. Post Office boxes and counter screen, and basement plumbing were altered in 1908. Revolving door at west entrance and new vaults were installed in 1917. New delivery vestibule (removed in 1934) and driveway extension were built in 1923. New tile floor in lobby was laid in 1931. In 1934-35 most important change occurred, when eastern one-story addition measuring 74'-6" x 60' was built. New heating and plumbing equipment, and new entrance vestibules were installed at the same time. Exterior window grilles and areaway gratings were installed in 1938. New boiler and heating plant were installed in 1939-40. Concrete basement floor was poured in 1940. Design of roof as shown on original elevations was altered before construction. Granite chimneys and iron roof cresting were removed at undetermined date after 1901.
6. Important old views: Photograph c. 1900 is reproduced in A History of Public Buildings under the Control of the Treasury Department (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), opposite p. 247.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Building has served as Rockland Post Office since 1876 and as Customhouse since 1877.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Original plans, vide supra.
2. Secondary and published sources: A History of Public Buildings under the Control of the Treasury Department. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Massive quarry-faced granite walls

with bold Italianate detailing are crowned by a slate mansard roof. The building has an appearance of great strength and solidity.

2. Condition of fabric: Exterior excellent, interior good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Building measures 82'-10" x 121'-10" overall. Two-and-a-half story main block is rectangular with slightly projecting center pavilions and has seven-bay front and five-bay sides. Modern rear addition is one-storied.
2. Foundations: Granite walls 2'-6" to 3'-6" thick rest on concrete footings 5'-5" to 6'-5" wide. Modern addition has concrete foundations.
3. Wall construction: Light gray granite bearing walls of 2' to 3' thick quarry-faced ashlar are laid up in 1'-3- $\frac{1}{2}$ " high courses and have hammered granite trim including rusticated quoins, a water table, and two belt courses. Four center pavilions of original block project 1'. Walls of rear addition match original granite except for brick walls facing loading platforms.
4. Framing: Interior bearing walls are masonry. Four cast-iron columns support beams of undetermined material spanning open postal working space on first floor. Second and third floor wooden joists measure 14" x 2" and are set 1'-3" on center. Roof framing is wooden. Rafters measure 3" x 6" and are set 2' on center.
5. Porches, stoops, etc.: Two 2'-7" high concrete loading platforms, each measuring 10' x 29', flank ell of rear addition and are sheltered by extensions of ell roof. Broad, low granite stoops (three risers) are at Limerock Street, School Street, and main (west) entrances. Unsheltered concrete steps (15 risers) descend west to basement door in north wall of rear addition.
6. Chimneys: Eight 3' square chimneys of rusticated granite with bracketed cornices originally flanked four pavilion pediments and were removed at undetermined date after 1901.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main (west) entrance archway measures 8' x 13'-7". Limerock and School Street entrances measure 5'-10" x 13'-7". Rusticated granite quoins flank entrances. Rusticated granite voussoirs have semicircular intradoses and ogival extradoses. Original wooden double doors had

heavily molded panels, six in each main (west) door, and three in each door of other entrances. Reveal of main entrance is 3' deep. Other entrances have 2' reveals.

Main entrance has semicircular six-light transom composed of lunette and radial muntins. Semicircular transoms of other entrances have single lights. Modern wooden double storm doors with two panels each (upper panels glazed) have replaced original doors. Limerock Street and main entrances have modern revolving doors in lobby.

- b. Windows and shutters: Window openings of main block are headed by rusticated granite voussoirs with semicircular intradoses and ogival extradoses. Granite sills are continuations of belt courses. Except for second-floor windows of side pavilions and rear pavilion, windows are grouped in pairs and separated by 2' wide piers. Openings measure 9'-9" x 3'-6" on first floor and 8' x 3'-6" on second floor. All have wooden two-over-two light double hung sash set within deep reveals. Basement windows rise approximately 1' above grade and are lighted by areaways. Aweaway with granite retaining walls and ornamental iron railing ran length of east wall and was obliterated when rear addition was built in 1934-35. There are no shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Mansard roof of double pitch has flat deck. Lower pitch is approximately 48 degrees, upper approximately 25 degrees. Sloping surfaces are slate-covered; deck is copper-sheathed. Roof originally had iron cresting of curvilinear pattern crowned by five-pointed stars.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Bracketed granite cornice projects approximately 3' beyond wall plane and is interrupted by raking cornices of four pavilion pediments. Granite coping above cornice forms base for roof. Eaves do not have gutters. Rear addition has flat composition roof.
- c. Dormers: Pedimented granite dormers have slate roofs and round-headed windows with wooden two-over-two-light double-hung sash.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: NOTE; For main block, reference is to original plans. Limerock Street (north) and main (west)

entrances lead to L-shaped lobby averaging 12' wide and separated by post office counter and screen on south and east sides from central work space measuring approximately 44' x 49'. Northeast and southeast corners of building are occupied by offices measuring 12' x 22' divided from central work space by light screening walls. Principal door to northeast office is cut through masonry east wall of lobby. Postmaster's office in southeast corner has main door in masonry east wall of stairhall. Stairhall in southwest corner measures 12' x 32' and is entered from School Street (south) door. Two doors pierce masonry north wall of stairhall, one leading to central work room, and one to lobby. Height of main block first floor ceilings is 15'-3". Modern rear addition has work room measuring 29'-10" x 71' and shipping room measuring approximately 20' x 27' at east end.

- b. Second floor; Stairhall 12'-2" x 33'-2" in southwest corner and center corridor 10'-4" wide form L-shaped circulation area. Corridor leads past four offices to custom room 25'-6" x 55" occupying entire north third of second-floor space. Center offices measure 22'-3" x 23'-2". Office in southeast corner measures 22'-2" x 25'-8". Small office between stairhall and west center office measures 12'-6" x 15'-2" and was converted to lavatory in 1903. Height of ceilings is 13'-10" except custom room, which is 18'-6" high.
- c. Attic: Room 25'-8" x 56' occupies north third of space. Rooms 23'-2" x 23'-4" are centered on east and west sides. Southeast corner has room 22'-2" x 25'-8". Southeast corner has L-shaped room with extreme dimensions measuring 25'-8" x 33'-2". Central passage 10'-4" wide provides access to all five rooms from attic stairhall.

- 2. Stairways: Granite basement stairs descend east nineteen risers in straight run along masonry partition between stairhall and boiler room. Iron basement stairs descend west sixteen risers from work room in straight run along partition between lavatory in southeast corner and storage room. Cast-iron 5'-wide main stairs ascend west seventeen risers along partition between stairhall and work room to broad landing along west wall and return east eleven risers along south wall. Attic stairs 3' wide are in enclosed well between central corridor and small office (now lavatory) on east side north of main stairhall. Straight run of six risers ascends south. Six winders turn ninety degrees to straight run of eight risers running north. Two winders turn forty-five degrees to two risers ascending east to attic floor. Stairs to roof ascend south eighteen risers from central passage of attic.

3. Flooring: Basement has modern cement floor. Post office lobby has modern quarry tile floor. Other floors are wooden, some covered by linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are painted plaster above wooden baseboards in original block. Modern workroom east of original block has wooden matchboard dadoes approximately 6'-6" high with plastered walls above. Modern shipping room walls are brick. Original plans indicate matchboard dadoes in custom room on second floor. Ceilings are plaster with molded plaster cornices in original block.
5. Doorways and doors: Interior doorways average approximately 3'-3" x 8'. Total height of openings including rectangular single-light set above doors is approximately 10'. Original doors had six inset panels with heavy moldings. Original plans indicate both six-paneled and four-paneled doors on second floor. Modern doors have glass upper panels.
6. Decorative features and trim: Cast-iron columns on first floor have Corinthianesque capitals. Architraves of doors and windows are wooden, heavily molded. Single inset panels are placed below window sills. Ceiling of custom room at north end of second floor is coved and has more elaborate plaster cornice than other rooms.
7. Notable hardware: None noted.
8. Lighting: Modern electric lighting.
9. Heating: Original heating, installed by Bartlett, Robbins & Co. of Baltimore, Maryland, was apparently combined steam or hot water and hot air system. First floor was heated by both vertical coil radiators and hot air registers supplied from flues in outer walls. Second floor was heated by registers fed from wall and chimney flues. Chimney registers were set within carved and molded round-arched mantelpieces and faced with ornamental grilles. Cold air intakes were immediately below heat vents. Modern steam heating system was installed in 1939-40.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting and orientation: Site is bounded 182'-9" by Limerock Street on north, 156'-4" by School Street on south, 144' by unnamed one-block street (now unofficially called Post Office Square) on west, and 185'-6" by private property on east. Principal facade faces west.
2. Enclosures: Iron pipe two-rail fences enclose grass plots.

3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks: Modern cement walks.
5. Landscaping: Rear of lot and public entrance approaches are paved. Four grass plots (east of north and south entrances and at northwest and southwest corners) were planted with *elaeanus longpipes*, *syringa chinensis*, *berberis thunbergi*, and *pachysandra terminalis* in 1935. Most of the shrubs have since perished, but a few remain.

Prepared by Denys Peter Myers
Principal Architectural Historian
National Park Service
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